

UNCLASSIFIEDImplementation of P.L. 108-333 Section 104  
(North Korea Human Rights Act, FY 04)

## Actions to Promote Freedom of Information in North Korea

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has one of the most repressive governments in the world, and it tightly controls the media and citizens' access to information. As the North Korea Human Rights Act (the Act) states, "The Government of North Korea attempts to control all information, artistic expression, academic works, and media activity inside North Korea and strictly curtails freedom of speech and access to foreign broadcasts" (section 3). Section 104 of the Act authorizes the President "to take such actions as may be necessary to increase the availability of information inside North Korea by increasing the availability of sources of information not controlled by the Government of North Korea, including sources such as radios capable of receiving broadcasting from outside North Korea." The Act authorizes the appropriation of \$2 million for such actions for each of fiscal years 2005 through 2008, but no funds have been appropriated for this purpose. The Act requires the present report on actions that have been taken pursuant to Section 104.

Background

The Department's 2004 Human Rights Report on the DPRK states, "The Government sought to control virtually all information... Domestic media censorship was enforced strictly, and no deviation from the official government line was tolerated." The Report also states, "The Government prohibits listening to foreign media broadcasts except by the political elite," and that radios are fixed so as only to receive domestic broadcasts. At the same time, there is evidence that an increasing number of information-starved North Koreans are risking arrest or other forms of punishment by listening to foreign broadcasts. This demand has led to an increase in the number of radios inside the DPRK that are capable of receiving foreign broadcasts.

Surveys of North Koreans outside the DPRK conducted over the last three years by InterMedia, a media research organization, have indicated that the most common means of obtaining information inside the DPRK are televisions and radios. Additionally, a high percentage of these individuals report having owned cassette players in the DPRK, and indicated that they

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obtained tapes smuggled into the country from China to learn South Korean songs. The survey also found that a number of persons owned cell phones while in the DPRK, usually using them on the Chinese operating system in the border regions. Some individuals reported modifying their televisions and radios to receive foreign broadcasts. Individual and NGO accounts indicate that, to avoid punishment for possessing illegal radios, some North Koreans own two radios: one with a fixed dial that they can show to the authorities, and one that they hide that has been modified to receive foreign broadcasts. To avoid detection by authorities, foreign broadcast listeners appear primarily to tune in late at night. Among radio owners, medium wave (or AM) radios appear to be the most common, followed by FM radios and finally shortwave radios. Some North Koreans report watching television broadcasts from China, or listening to radio broadcasts from the Republic of Korea or from VOA or RFA.

InterMedia cautions that this information is obtained from North Koreans outside the country, some of whom left the DPRK several years ago and many of whom appear to have been members of the elite and therefore may have had greater ability to obtain prohibited means of receiving information. The results of the surveys may therefore not fully describe the present situation in the country. Nonetheless, there is evidence that the general population has some access to these sources, and this survey provides an indication of the challenges many North Koreans must overcome given the information environment inside the DPRK.

The Department of State is not aware of additional significant surveys or metrics evaluating the quality and reach of foreign broadcasts in the DPRK. Traditional direct polling, used elsewhere in the world, would not be feasible in the DPRK. There has not been a comprehensive study of the reach and intensity of broadcasts into North Korea, or DPRK efforts to jam transmissions.

Current USG Activities

The U.S. Government funds Korean-language broadcasting into the DPRK through the Board of Broadcasting Governors. Voice of America (VOA) currently broadcasts three hours of Korean-language programming each day into the DPRK (one and a half hours of original programming, one and a half hours of repeat programming) on shortwave and medium wave bands. Radio Free Asia (RFA) broadcasts four daily hours of Korean

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language programming (one hour and 15 minutes of original programming and two hours and 45 minutes of repeat programming) on the shortwave band. The VOA and RFA broadcasts collectively run from 5:00 am until 8:00 am and from 10:00 pm until 2:00 am. The U.S. Government does not currently engage in or fund any programs, covert or otherwise, that provide the means through which persons inside the DPRK could receive information from outside the country (e.g., importation of radios or other hardware).

Potential for Future Programs

Although not currently engaging in such activities, the Department of State is aware of numerous proposals from non-governmental organizations and other groups for programs that would attempt to increase the availability of information from outside the DPRK inside the country. Such proposals include 1) expanding Korean-language broadcasting aimed at North Koreans; 2) increasing medium-wave radio broadcasts; 3) providing radios or other devices capable of receiving foreign broadcasts for use in the DPRK; 4) providing literature from outside the DPRK to those inside the country; and 5) recording programming onto cassette and/or video tapes for use in the DPRK. Should funds be appropriated pursuant to Section 104 of the Act, the Department of State would explore these and other proposals through a formal process to determine which would be the most effective programs in reaching an audience inside the DPRK without involuntarily putting people in danger of increased harm at the hands of authorities.

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